

Double Consciousness: The Portrayal of Black Life in Theatre

by

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Artistic Aims

My immediate goal through writing this paper is to explain how W.E.B Du Bois's coined term, *double consciousness*, impacts the depiction of African American and black life in theatre. Du Bois defines this term in his literary work titled, *The Souls of Black Folk*, as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (Du Bois, p. 2) Ultimately, this term is directly referring to the effects that racism has on black identity. My long term goal is to bring attention to how African Americans perceive themselves which results in how they are perceived on stage by an audience. Consciously and subconsciously, the black community in the United States go about their daily routines making decisions both precisely and loosely based on their race. Understanding this term and what it means is important not only for the black community, but for all races because it has negative social effects on society. Why is that the case? It gives one race too much power and that in itself is incredibly dangerous. History has shown this and continues to do so. It is with great hope that this paper will have a positive impact on those who come across it in which black theatre can be presented in its most authentic self.

The purpose of writing this paper is because it is important to address topics surrounding race, especially in the United States, where race played an enormous role in its history and continues to play an enormous role, currently, in the 21st century. As an Afro-Latina, I find myself always being aware of my racial identity here in the United States. The double consciousness was something that I was not even aware of that I was experiencing. I am appreciative that I can explore theatrical works that will affirm this concept's presence.

I will be dissecting and analyzing five different plays: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) adapted by George Aiken from the novel of the same name, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry, *Dutchman* (1964) by LeRoi Jones, now known as Amiri Baraka, *Funnyhouse of A Negro* (1964) by Adrienne Kennedy, and *Native Son* (2016) adapted from the novel of the same name by Nambi E. Kelley . In my research, I will be correlating the double consciousness concept to these plays as it ties into how black life is portrayed in theatre.

Double Consciousness: *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

How does it feel to be a problem?

There cannot be a true understanding of how black life is depicted on stage until there is a thorough analysis of Du Bois' term, *double consciousness*. We must delve deeper into what this truly means and in order to do so, we must acknowledge where America is as a country during the time in which this was written in 1903. At this point, slavery has already been abolished for nearly four decades. Yes, this meant a win for African Americans, but the progression for integrating them into American society was going to be a long and unpredictable one. "How does it feel to be a problem?" (Du Bois, p.1) This question comes from the black community believing and accepting, through their experiences, that not only do the white community view them as an issue, but how they view themselves as an issue as well. Du Bois brings up something he refers to as *the veil* in chapter one which made it hard for white Americans to see black Americans as *true* Americans and made it hard for the black community to see themselves as anything other than the way they were portrayed by the white community. This *veil* that Du Bois mentions is damaging to black identity.

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.

Du Bois starts off chapter two by stating, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” (Du Bois, p. 9) The color line which figuratively and metaphorically divided the country by race was shaping black identity. The Freedmen’s Bureau resulted in free schools and free elementary education for the black community, but there was a great opposition to “Negro education.” (Du Bois, p. 20) The black community was met with intimidation, insults, and violence because the South believed that an “educated Negro” was a “dangerous Negro.” (Du Bois, p. 20)

The Souls of Black Folk will serve as the basis of the research of the plays that will be analyzed and dissected. With Du Bois’ autoethnography, the concept of double consciousness will be thoroughly explored in these works as it helps with the understanding of black life being portrayed in theatrical works.

Analyzing The Plays

***Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)**

Uncle Tom’s Cabin is an anti-slavery novel written by abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe, in 1852. This novel was so popular when it was first published, that it actually became the second best selling piece of literature following the Christian Bible. A few months after it was published, George Aiken, adapted it into a stage play, which is the most widely known as well as performed adaptation. The play surrounds the life of a middle aged enslaved man who is referred to as Uncle Tom. He displays obedience and loyalty to his masters. He is devoted to the Christian faith and Christianity plays a significant role in the play as it affects a wide range of

characters, especially Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom is positively received by his master, Mr. Shelby and his wife as well as their daughter, Eva, who clearly adores him. In the end, despite his circumstances, Uncle Tom upheld his Christian values and was whipped to death for it by his new master. Although the intention of this work was to put a spotlight on the evils of slavery, it inspired and popularized stereotypes about black people.

Racial Stereotypes

Uncle Tom

Harriet Beecher Stowe's intention was for Uncle Tom to be viewed as a hero in her novel. However, it has become a derogatory term used in the black community as a label of a black man who aims to please the white man by being loyal and servile. An individual being called this is also viewed as a "sellout" in that they favor the wellbeing of another race over their own. The female equivalent would be an "Aunt Jemima." From the start to the very end of the play, Uncle Tom did what he has always done, which was be obedient, submissive, and devoted to God. He changed his submissive tune slightly at a cruel command given by his new master, but he has remained for the most part, unchanged. At the start of the play, enslaved women, Eliza and Chloe try to convince Uncle Tom to run away because he is being sold along with Eliza's son to pay off their master's debt. Even after hearing this unfortunate news, Uncle Tom refuses to run away, but wishes Eliza well for her escape:

"No, no—I ain't going. Let Eliza go—it's her right. I wouldn't be the one to say no—'tain't in natur' for her to stay; but you heard what she said? If I must be sold, or all the people on the place, and everything go to rack, why, let me be sold. I s'pose I can bar it as well as any one.

Mas'r always found me on the spot—he always will. I never have broken trust, nor used my pass no ways contrary to my word, and I never will. It's better for me to go alone, than to break up the place and sell all. Mas'r ain't to blame, and he'll take care of you and the poor little 'uns!" (Aiken, 1.3)

Even though Uncle Tom knew he would be sold and more than likely to a master that was not as kind as Mr. Shelby was to him, he wanted to remain obedient and loyal even if that meant he would be away from his wife and children. At the time in which this was written, it was likely seen as a noble thing that Uncle Tom did. However, as this work aged, his acceptance of his servitude as well as his attempts to always please his masters has become heavily frowned upon within the black community. Therefore, when this term of being an “Uncle Tom” is used today, it is viewed solely as a derogatory one.

Pickaninny

By definition, a pickaninny, is a small black child, but its usage in the United States is to be used as a racial slur. The pickaninny caricature depicted black children as feral beings who consumed foods such as watermelon and chicken. They were drawn as extremely dark, wild haired, and poorly clothed with large red mouths consuming enlarged sized watermelons. The character, Topsy, is an example of this racial stereotype. She has wild hair and is poorly dressed. She does not know much about who she is, but she for sure knows *what* she is- property. She has no knowledge of who her parents are, where she comes from or even her age. When the audience is first introduced to Topsy, she is presented as a mischievous girl who likes to steal and destroy things. Throughout the play, Topsy can be heard saying several times, “I’s so wicked.” The

intention for this character was to show the devastating effects of slavery, however, this character has turned into a racial stereotype that has been seen on advertisements, literary pieces, theatricals works, and more. Ophelia attempts to tame Topsy, so that she would no longer misbehave, but to no avail. When asked by Augustine St. Claire if she sees how much effort Ophelia has put into teaching her, Topsy expresses:

“Lord, yes, mas'r! old missis used to say so, too. She whipped me a heap harder, and used to pull my ha'r, and knock my head agin the door; but it didn't do me no good. I 'spects if they's to pull every spear of ha'r out o' my head, it wouldn't do no good neither—I's so wicked! Laws! I's nothin' but a nigger, no ways!” (Aiken, 3.1)

All Topsy sees herself as, is someone who is not worth anything because she is black and enslaved. She does not see herself as anything of value and her acceptance of her servitude based on the color of her skin is something that has a deep and negative impact on her self worth. She is a clear example of how slavery damaged black identity.

A Raisin in the Sun (1959)

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry is about the Youngers, an African American family living in Chicago in the 1950s. The patriarch of the family has recently passed and his family is waiting for his life insurance money to come in the mail. This is the root of the play as each member of the family has a different idea on what to do with the money. The competing ideas are what drives the play and after Walter loses his portion of the money to his thieving friend, Mama puts a down payment on a house in a white neighborhood. This applies a further strain on the family as their future neighbors send Mr. Lindner from the neighborhood's

improvement association to convince the Youngers to live within black communities and out of their white community. Mr. Lindner's attempts to keep the Youngers out of the neighborhood fail and the Youngers move into their new home by the end of the play despite knowing the obstacles they would have to overcome in hopes of having a better life and achieving the American Dream.

Harlem by Langston Hughes

Montage of a Dream Deferred, also referred to as *Harlem*, is a book length poem by Harlem Renaissance writer, Langston Hughes, that focuses on Harlem, New York as well as the people who live there who are predominately black. The question here might be in regards to trying to understand what is the connection between this play from the late 1950s to a piece of Harlem Renaissance literature from the 1920s. The answer to that question is simple because it is all in the title of the play as Hansberry borrows a line from Hughes' *Harlem*-

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

This poem is about the dreams and aspirations of African Americans. The common struggle that the African American community shares is that at this time in history, their dreams have been delayed and put on hold. Hughes warns that when these dreams are delayed as such that only negativity can be a result. What causes these dreams to be delayed in the African American community? It is a mixture of a few things with a huge impact such as oppression, racism, and prejudice. Themes of racism and the American Dream is displayed through the characters and the circumstances that they are in. The title of the play is fitting for these reasons.

Theme: *Institutional Racism*

A specific theme from the play that ties into Du Bois' double consciousness concept is the theme of institutional racism, which is also known as systemic racism. In order to speak on the connection between institutional racism and double consciousness, it is crucial to understand what institutional racism actually is and how it affects African Americans in the United States. Institutional racism is defined as how a society operates through different systems, especially social systems. This affects people of color in the systems of education, job opportunities, and housing opportunities. The Youngers had dreams and aspirations and those dreams seemed closer to being a reality because of the life insurance money. There was no agreement on what gets to be done with the money and Mama decided to put a down payment on a home that will accommodate their growing family and give some hope to them that they can attain the American Dream one day. In a conversation about securing the home, the Youngers learn that

the home is in Clybourne Park, an entirely white neighborhood. Mama states, "I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family...Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could." (Hansberry, 2.1) This quote is an example of what institutional racism is and in the play, it is within the housing opportunities available for African Americans in Chicago. Once the Youngers realized what neighborhood Mama purchased a home at, they were not too enthusiastic. Race relations were not on the upside, not like it has ever been in the first place, and the Youngers believed that they should not be living in a neighborhood where they are not welcomed. The double consciousness concept applies here because instead of being exhilarated about getting a new home, once learning of its location, the Youngers immediately thought about the problems that may arise as an African American family living in a white neighborhood. Finding a home is not the easiest thing to do as it comes with its challenges just like other aspects of life, but when you are the oppressed, the search is even more difficult. Wanting to live in a pleasant area that is affordable would understandably be a top priority, but for others, the two do not coexist. Some neighborhoods may be affordable, but full of crime or other neighborhoods may be lovely to reside in, but the cost is far out of reach. On top of that, finding somewhere that is welcoming may also be a challenge as it was for the Youngers. The Clybourne Park Improvement Association sent Mr. Lindner to convince the Youngers to stay away from their neighborhood by offering a few thousand dollars. Mr. Lindner suggests,

“...And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better...when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of

Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities.”

(Hansbury, 2.3)

The Youngers were very much aware of how the white community viewed them prior to Mr. Lindner’s appearance, but all his visit did was remind them that they would never be positively accepted into the community. Sure, Mr. Lindner explicitly explained that race had nothing to do with the decision made by the association. However, it was the social aspects behind his visit that made it undeniably clear that African Americans had no place in a white neighborhood. Mr. Lindner attempting to pay the Youngers off as a means to keep them out of Clybourne Park only reinforced the fact that racism and prejudice is alive and well.

Theme: *Family Values and the American Dream*

At the start of the play, Mama speaks about her late husband, Walter:

“God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger—hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women—plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something—be something...Big Walter used to say... “Seem like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile.”” (Hansbury, 1.1)

This quote discusses how the recently deceased patriarch of the Younger household had this American Dream for him and his family. He wanted his family to have and be what they wanted in life. He internalized that God did not see the black race fit to have anything other than hopes and dreams as they have to go through obstacles in life that still does not enable them to achieve

the ideal American Dream. In the end, the Youngers do move into their new home despite being asked to move elsewhere. Walter took a stand and made it clear to Mr. Lindner that a price could not be placed on the American Dream that all the characters so heavily craved:

“And we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick. We don’t want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. And that’s all we got to say about that. We don’t want your money.” (Hansberry, 3.1)

What reason can be given to explain the hardships that the black community faced post slavery other than racism and prejudice? White Americans refused to view Black Americans as *true* Americans and these beliefs are evident in the way society has been constructed. Walter expressed to Mr. Lindner that his family will try their best to be good neighbors and he made that statement because the Clybourne Park community already has their idea of how a black family would act and those feelings stem from nowhere other than racial stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice.

Dutchman (1964)

Dutchman is a one-act play by Amiri Baraka, then known as LeRoi Jones. It is about two strangers, a young black man named Clay and a young white woman named Lula, riding on the same train in the New York City subway. Lula challenges Clay’s black identity and makes him insecure over it. She is in control of their conversation from the very beginning, learning a lot about Clay by making assumptions about him based on racial stereotypes, while she barely reveals anything about herself. Lula mocks Clay and makes fun of his vernacular, education, and

attire. He eventually gets fed up with her and asks her to leave him alone, breaks into a monologue about racial inequality, and attempts to get off the train. Lula responds by stabbing him in the heart and he dies. The other subway passengers toss his body off the train and the play ends with Lula observing another young black man at the next stop. Lula belittles Clay about his appearance and his mannerisms. She asks him the following:

“What’ve you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why’re you wearing a jacket and tie like that?... Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn’t go to Harvard.”

(Jones, 1.1)

Lula wants Clay to feel as if he is trying to *act white*. She makes it known that his attire is representative of those who oppress him and that he does not have the right to wear such attire because he is a descendant of slaves. Why is education and fine attire attributed to one race and not the other? What is the correlation between race and intelligence? Is there a causal relationship? This perspective dates back to slavery as those who were enslaved were not taught or allowed to be literate. Enslaved individuals probably did not think that they would be granted the opportunity of attaining an education and after the abolishment of slavery and the creation of programs such as the Freedmen’s Bureau, individuals like Clay jumped at the chance to get an education as that was not an option for the generations prior. Lula continues to insult Clay during their ride- “Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would be Christian. You ain’t no nigger, you’re just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me Clay.” (Jones, 1.2) Once again, Lula is implying that Clay is acting like a white man because of his mannerisms. At the time in which

the play is set, which is the 60s, to present day, the racist term, *acting white*, is used mostly towards black people who are thought to be betraying their own culture by taking on the social expectations of the white community. Clay, after being fed up with Lula's antics, makes the following remarks:

“Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers... and don't know yet what they're doing. They say, 'I love Bessie Smith.' And don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, 'Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.'... If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world.” (Jones, 1.2)

When Clay goes on this rant and brings up blues singer, Bessie Smith, he expresses his views on black people who turn to dance and music to repress their emotions. He believes that there would be no need for the blues if black people just took out white people. He believes that instead of murder, this is how black people get their fix and their release. It can be assumed that Clay feels that all of the black community's problems would be solved if white society ceased to exist. Clay is conscious of how he is viewed by society and it can be said that he understands that regardless of the steps he takes such as attaining a higher education, he will continue to be viewed that way.

***Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964)**

Funnyhouse of a Negro is a one-act play by Adrienne Kennedy about a young black woman named Sarah living in New York City, who is struggling with her mixed racial identity. Sarah idolizes her mother for being white and with that same logic, she despises her father for

being black. This internalized struggle manifests itself through her many selves and this includes the following (in the order in which they appear): Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba, and Jesus Christ. Through these many selves, the audience can take a look at what goes on within Sarah's mind about how she perceives herself. At the very start of the play, the audience can get a sense of what Sarah thinks of the white and black community through one of her many selves. Sarah, in the form of the Duchess of Hapsburg, states the following:

“How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one? My mother looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's. And at least I am yellow, but he is black, the blackest one of them all. I hoped he was dead...”

(Kennedy, p.8, 1.1)

The Duchess of Hapsburg mentions the complexion of her skin when she says, “at least I am yellow” and it is clear that physical features are important to her. While staying on the topic of appearances, Sarah (Negro) expresses:

“In appearance, I am good looking in a boring way; no glaring Negroid features, medium nose, medium mouth and pale yellow skin. My one defect is that I have a head of frizzy hair, unmistakably Negro kinky hair; and it is indistinguishable.” (Kennedy, p.11, 1.1)

Through this quote, Sarah points out her insecurities over her physical features. She is content that her nose, mouth, and skin tone does not scream “negro”, but believes her hair is flawed due to its kinky texture, which is a hair texture that is prevalent in the black community. Through Sarah's monologue, the audience learns that she wants to have as little black features as possible and she wants to look like the pallid black women that are on the covers of magazines. This is why it is so crucial to bring awareness about representation because it truly matters in the way

people look at themselves. What people see in the media, through different forms of art, and more matters because it molds how people feel about the person they see in the mirror everyday. As the monologue progresses, Sarah (Negro) emphasizes her views about the two races:

“Victoria always wants me to tell her of whiteness. She wants me to tell her of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones. For as we of royal blood know, black is evil and has been from the beginning.”

(Kennedy, 1.1)

Through this quote, it is quite evident, if not clear before, that Sarah equates white to goodness and black to evil. Sarah is not alone in thinking like this. In the 1940s, married psychologist couple, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, conducted experiments referred to as “the doll tests” and these series of experiments as well as their results were very telling. Drs. Clark were interested in testing children’s (between the ages of three and seven) racial perceptions. To test it, they used four identical baby dolls that only differed by their skin color and then asked the subjects to identify the race of these dolls as well as choose the dolls that they preferred. Their findings showed that a majority of the subjects preferred the white over the brown colored dolls and associated positive attributes to these white dolls. These experiments played a role in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case and helped Americans understand how racial disparities in the United States negatively affected the self esteem of African American children. Just as Du Bois explained in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the black community has this double consciousness and view themselves as “the problem.” They associate negative attributes to themselves and this

“white is right” mindset is damaging to the black community and their future generations as they learn to hate themselves.

Native Son (2016)

Native Son by Nambi E. Kelley is an adaptation of the 1940 novel of the same name by Richard Wright that follows the chaotic journey of a young African American man named Bigger Thomas from Southside Chicago in the 1930s. Bigger attains a job as a chauffeur for the Dalton's, who is a wealthy, white, and influential family. To be more specific, his responsibility is to chauffeur their daughter, Mary. Tragedy struck when Bigger accidentally killed Mary one night and tried to dispose of her body fearing that due to his race, he would not be given a chance to explain what transpired that night. Ultimately, his actions are driven by his awareness of being a black man in an oppressive and racist society. He tries to have full control over his situation and this creates further problems. As a result, the audience witnesses his inevitable downfall over the course of the play.

The play begins with *A Biggerlogue*, in which The Black Rat, the voice inside Bigger's head, speaks: “We all got two minds. How we see them seeing us. How we see our own self. But how they see you take over on the inside. And when you look in the mirror- You only see what they tell you you is. A black rat sonofabitch.”(Kelley, 1.1) This quote is directly related to Du Bois' theory of double consciousness as it affects Bigger throughout the entirety of the play. The audience learns how the theory of double consciousness affects Bigger's decision making. As Bigger is trying to dispose of Mary's body, thus, disposing of any evidence that he killed her, he has a conversation with The Black Rat:

“I killed a white woman! Talking to me that way and letting Jan hold my hand and sitting next to me with your thigh touching mine and making me drink and making me bring you home and you’re drunk. Don’t you understand they would fire me if they find me in your room. They would fire me! You want me to lose my job? I was trapped. Why didn’t you leave me alone? What had I done to you? You made me do it. I had to- I had to-.”

(Kelley, 1.46)

In this scene, Bigger is having an internal conflict. He knows what he did to Mary was wrong even though her death was an accident, but in this scene, he is trying to place the blame on her. As Bigger is trying to get her body to fit in the furnace, he recalls all of the things that she had him partake in and how it would have cost him his job. He knew that if Mary’s mother caught him in her bedroom with her, even if it was innocent, that it would not end well for him. The image of a competent black man with a drunk white woman would have been a threatening sight for people on the outside to see and Bigger was aware of that.

In scene forty nine, Bigger’s girlfriend, Bessie, asks him if he kissed or touched Mary and her reasoning for asking him this is because she knows that everyone will think that he raped Mary before killing her. That fear becomes a reality in scene fifty two when Bigger reads the newspaper and it is being publicized that Mary’s death was a sex crime. In a press conference, Mr. Britten pleads with the public and insists on “NO MOB VIOLENCE.” This scene is particularly interesting when looking back at lynchings of African Americans by mobs due to accusations of black men committing crimes. An unfortunate example of this is the lynching of Hayes Turner in May of 1918 in Georgia. A white planter named Hampton Smith was murdered and subsequently, a manhunt was launched. One of the many individuals accused of murdering

Smith was Hayes Turner. He was arrested and placed in jail and on route to be placed in another jail, he was taken by a mob and was then lynched. Outraged over the unjust lynching of her husband, eight month pregnant Mary Turner, called out the mob, in which they did not respond pleasantly. The following day, she, too, was lynched. She was also set on fire and had her body riddled with bullets. Her baby was cut out of her body and stomped to death by members of the mob. It is the cruel and merciless history of this country such as the lynchings just mentioned that embedded fear in Bigger's heart. Bigger expresses his feelings about his inevitable fate with *The Black Rat*:

“It’s what *they* do! Choke you off the face of the earth! Don’t even let you feel what you want to feel. After you so hot and hard you only feel what they doing to you. They like God! Kill you before you die...Like somebody step in my skin, start acting for me. Like my mind ain’t my mind, like... my body is their body... say... do... be... whatever *they* say I do... be... I... I... killed cause... that white lady... she was killing me! I didn’t mean to... I didn’t want to kill! But what I killed for must’ve been good! Ain’t the rat ‘neath the bed! Ain’t the rat I killed! Now I see. Ain’t no sense being scared no more. What I killed for, I am! I am free. Free. Free.” (Kelley, 1.63)

In this scene, Bigger finally puts into words how his situation is *bigger* than just Mary’s death. His situation is not *just* a murder, it is a murder of a white woman at the hands of a black man. Those circumstances place him in a situation where he will never win in and he has accepted that in this scene. He has accepted that it does not matter what he does or does not do because regardless if he was guilty or not, he would always end up being the bad guy in the eyes of a

racist and oppressive society. At the end of the play, Bigger is arrested by the police and voices can be heard saying to kill and lynch him. In a fantasy world, Bigger's body suspends into the air and he smiles, but the playwright makes it very clear to note that his flight is not an indication of celebration. He will have no control over his body as whatever society wants to do to him will happen regardless as he is left without a choice in that matter. However, he can choose to accept his fate and that makes him free.

After thoroughly analyzing Du Bois' autoethnography, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and applying that knowledge for the purposes of dissecting theatrical works, it can be argued that this concept of double consciousness is, in fact, accurate. African Americans see themselves through the eyes of others and this concept is evident in theatre. The plays used for the purposes of exploring Du Bois concept served as a great range of works as it was a mixture of white, black, male, and female playwrights, and yet the depiction of black life in these plays were equally eye opening. The way double consciousness presented itself in the plays analyzed showed how this concept can be devastating to black identity, but it is important to understand how it is used as a survival mechanism. Looking at one's self through the eyes of others is how people operate in the world. In the world of theatre, black identity has not reached its full potential as strong and heavy ties of the past continue to weigh down on it. Regardless of one's personal views about race, race will always play a crucial and significant role in the portrayal of black life in theatre.

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